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'JUDICIARY WORKING UNDER GREAT STRESS DUE TO COVID'

Chief Justice of India N V Ramana said on Thursday that the coronavirus has impacted SC judges and Registry officials

100 JUDGES, 2,700 JUDICIAL OFFICERS INFECTED

At least 100 high court judges and over 2,700 judicial officers have tested positive for the virus, the CJI said, adding that three HC judges and 34 judicial officers have lost their lives. In the SC, around 800 Registry staff, six Registrars and 10 Additional Registrars were infected at different points of times. On Wednesday, Justice D Y Chandrachud had tested +ve

PLAN TO LIVE-TELECAST SC PROCEEDINGS

- CJI Ramana said he was actively considering the proposal to live-telecast the proceedings of the Supreme Court
- However, the CJI added that the programme will be rolled out only if there is a general consensus among his colleagues in SC
- The Gujarat High Court is already live-streaming its proceedings

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THREE HC JUDGES AND 34 JUDICIAL OFFICERS SUCCUMBED TO THE VIRUS

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Move on vax gap raises questions on timing

CHETANA BELAGERE @ Bengaluru

THE Union Government's decision to extend the gap between two doses of the Covishield vaccine to 12-16 weeks from the existing 4-8 weeks, following the recommendation of the National Technical Advisory Group on Immunization (NTAGI), has sparked off a debate amongst the medical fraternity, public health experts and also those who are closely following the vaccine availability and shortage in the country.

Many of them felt that the decision, coming at a time when several states are battling a shortage of vaccines, may be viewed as the government inability to tide over the vaccine shortage and create further confusion among people who have already taken the first dose of vaccine and are planning to get the second dose after a gap of four weeks.

"As a vaccinologist I know about vaccine responses. The first dose is a sensitising one and it can be boosted anytime within one year. But what I fail to understand is why this shortage? Didn't the government order enough vaccines earlier? Are they depending on the manufacturers? There has definitely been a mismatch in the government's planning of the vaccine administration," said Dr John Jacob, renowned virologist and former professor at CMC Vellore.

The experts, however, agree that there have been studies published in medical journals like The Lancet and real-life evidence, particularly from the UK, showing that the efficacy of the vaccine is higher when there is a gap of 90 days.

A senior doctor said, "I agree that some countries like the UK and Canada have done this, but why is it that our government didn't think of it earlier? Just a few days ago, they were speaking about the importance of taking the second dose."

CONTINUED ON: P5

Vaccine factsheet

DOSES RECEIVED/ PROCURED BY THE CENTRE

SOURCE	QUANTITY	STATUS
PM-CARES FUND	6.6 crore (Covishield 5.6 cr & Covaxin 1 cr)	Utilised in full
GAVI COVAX facility	1 crore (Covishield)	Utilised in full
Procured for phase II	12 crore (Covishield 10 cr & Covaxin 2 cr)	86% received, rest expected by May-end
Procured for phase III	16 crore (Covishield 11 cr & Covaxin 5 cr)	Supply beginning in May and ending in July
TOTAL	35.6 crore (Covishield 27.6 cr & Covaxin 8 cr)	

35.6 Cr vaccine doses procured so far

51.6 crore
Add 16 crore doses that are in the pipeline under direct procurement by states & private hospitals and the total is 51.6 crore doses

BY YEAR-END DUE TO RAMPED UP PRODUCTION

Vaccines	Production/ availability Apr-Dec
Covishield	75.0 Cr
Covaxin	55.0 Cr
Bio E Sub unit	30.0 Cr
Zydus CadilaDNA	05.0 Cr
SII -Novavax	20.0 Cr
BB Nasal	10.0 Cr
GennovamRNA	06.0 Cr
Sputnik V	15.6 Cr
TOTAL	216.6 Cr

DOSES DELIVERED/ TO BE DELIVERED TO THE STATES IN MAY

- Free doses supplied by Centre to states/UTs: 1.65 cr
- Free doses to be supplied by Centre to States/UTs: 2.35 cr
- Doses directly procured by states/UTs: 1.23 cr
- Doses directly procured by states/UTs & in pipeline: 1.27 cr
- Doses directly procured by private hospitals: 0.80 cr

Total: 7.30 cr

Now, Second dose only after 3-4 months

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ New Delhi

THE Centre on Thursday accepted a proposal by an expert panel to raise the gap between two doses of Covishield to 12-16 weeks, deviating from the European Union and the UK's suggestions for a 12-week interval between the two shots.

Till now, a gap of 6-8 weeks was recommended between two doses of this vaccine in India. Spain alone prescribes a gap of 12-16 weeks between two shots, though it administers the AstraZeneca vaccine only to the 60+ age group amid concerns that in rare cases, it triggers blood clots in younger people.

The Centre's announcement immediately triggered speculation of it being tied to vaccine shortage, but Dr V K Paul, who heads the National Expert Group on Vaccine Administration for Covid-19, said the decision was based on science.

Real life data following mass vaccinations in the UK, said Paul, has shown that the larger gap between two doses of AstraZeneca vaccine raises its efficacy. The decision came after a recommendation by the National Expert Group on Vaccine Administration for Covid-19 (NEGVAC), which in turn relied on the scientific input by the Covid working group chaired by N K Arora.

The NEGVAC also suggested that those who have recovered from their Covid infection, should get the vaccine against the coronavirus six months after the recovery. The ministry is yet to formally accept the second recommendation.

The gap of 12-16 weeks for Covishield, originally developed by AstraZeneca-Oxford University and being manufactured by the Serum Institute of India locally has not been tested in clinical trials, experts pointed out.

THE BENEFICIARIES

Healthcare workers	1st dose	96,16,697
	2nd dose	66,02,553
Frontline workers	1st dose	1,43,14,563
	2nd dose	81,12,476
Age group 18-44 yrs	1st dose	39,14,688
Age group 45-59 yrs	1st dose	5,65,82,401
	2nd dose	85,14,552
Over 60 yrs	1st dose	5,42,32,598
	2nd dose	1,72,86,501
TOTAL		17,91,77,029

The NEGVAC endorsing a six month gap for Covid-19 vaccination following recovery from the infection is also being met with some skepticism. Just a few days ago, ICMR director general Balram Bhargava said those who have battled Covid-19 successfully, can get the vaccine six weeks following their recovery. "So far, I have not come across any scientific evidence which suggests that people who have had infection before should wait for six months for their shots against Covid-19," said immunologist Seyed Hasnain.

JAB-O-METER

TAKE YOUR SHOT

May 12: 17,72,261 doses

May 13: 19,75,176 doses

TOTAL: 17,91,77,029

NATIONWIDE	MAY 12	MAY 13
Fresh cases	3,48,421	3,62,727
Recoveries	3,55,338	3,52,181
Deaths	4,205	4,120

You (Centre) have been playing that irritating message on the phone whenever one makes a call... You are not vaccinating people but still say vaccination lagavaiye. What's the point of the message? - Delhi HC

Devi Shetty to head K'taka task force on third wave, Prof Kang to advise on jabs

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

AS if to make up for the apparent lack of preparedness in anticipating the severity of the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Karnataka Government is forming teams and preparing strategies well ahead of a third wave. With experts suggesting that the third wave may hit the state between October and November, the government has constituted a task force that will be headed by eminent cardiologist and health entrepreneur **Dr Devi Prasad Shetty**. Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa on Thursday announced that the task force will strategise the state's preparedness. The announcement comes even as the state is grappling to manage the current situation.

To give a fillip to its vaccination drive, that is moving at snail's pace due to shortage of vaccines, the government has decided to appoint Prof Gagandeep Kang, a prominent microbiologist from Christian Medical College (CMC), Vellore, who is part of various think tanks and advisory committees for the World Health Organisation. She has worked on the development and use of vaccines for rotaviruses, cholera, and typhoid, conducting large studies to define burden, test vaccines, and measure their impact.

"We are implementing robust strategies to fight this pandemic. Prof Gagandeep Kang will help the govt in formulating a vaccination strategy while the task force, headed by Dr Devi Shetty, will assist the government to prepare for the mitigation of a possible third wave," said Yediyurapppa. In a show of unity and attempt at being "transparent" in the measures taken to manage the pandemic, the CM, along with Deputy Chief Minister Dr C N Ashwath Narayan, ministers R Ashoka, Dr K Sudhakar and Arvind Limbavali addressed an hour-long press conference.

While the ministers reeled out numbers to suggest that there was no shortage of any resources - be it beds, Remdesivir, oxygen or ICU and ventilator beds - the attempt fell short of explaining the oxygen shortage which led to several deaths in the state. On two questions related to the Chamarajanagar incident, where 24 patients died within 24 hours, the CM said, "Since the matter is still being investigated, we will not make any comment until a final report is submitted." P3

DVS: Should we hang ourselves if vaccines are not available?

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

TWO days after the Karnataka High Court directed the Union Government to take up the issue of vaccine supplies with the manufacturers, Union Minister for Chemicals and Fertilizers, **D V Sadananda Gowda** on Thursday retorted saying, "Should we hang ourselves if we cannot vaccinate people as directed by the courts?"

Addressing the media at Vidhana Soudha along with BJP National General Secretary CT Ravi, Gowda lashed out saying, "If hypothetically, the courts tell us tomorrow that we have to give so many vaccines and assuming that we are not able to do so, should we hang ourselves?" when asked about courts intervening in the vaccination issue. The usually smiling Sadananda Gowda's 'strong statement,' was perhaps and indicator of the pressure on the government to ensure adequate supplies at a time when there is a visible shortage of vaccines in the country. Asked about the shortage of vaccines, Gowda said, "We are working with good intentions and it is our endeavour that everyone in the country should be vaccinated."

Regarding the numerous complaints about all-round shortages and long queues to get vaccines, he said, "When we look at numbers, those getting vaccinated till April was very small," the Union Minister said. P5

FROM ACROSS THE STATE

5,93,078
TOTAL ACTIVE CASES

27.64% Positivity Rate | **1,27,668** Samples tested on Thursday

1,09,76,189
TOTAL VACCINATIONS

Nine villages in Khanapur taluk of Belagavi district have been sealed down amid rising Covid cases

Davanagere district facing an acute shortage of oximeters and inhalers

Fire and Emergency personnel sanitise entire villages in Koppal district, which have seen a surge in cases

STATEWIDE	MAY 12	MAY 13
Fresh cases	39,998	35,297
Recoveries	34,752	34,057
Deaths	517	344

EXPRESS READ

NHRC notice to Centre over bodies in Ganga

New Delhi: The National Human Rights Commission has issued notices to the Union Jal Shakti Ministry, UP and Bihar, after receiving complaints about several bodies found floating in the Ganga in the two states. According to residents in Ballia district, UP, at least 52 bodies were seen floating at the Ujiyar, Kuthadia and Bharauli ghats. Similar reports of bodies floating in the river have come from Bihar.

Assam NRC: Coordinator seeks re-verification

New Delhi: Assam State NRC Coordinator Hitesh Dev Sharma has moved the SC seeking a comprehensive re-verification of the draft and supplementary list of NRC to fix glaring errors | P8

WITH THIS ISSUE
CITY'S BEST WEEKEND GUIDE
INDULGE
28 PAGES, INCLUDING 16 OF INDULGE (TABLOID)

ISRAEL PUMMELS GAZA AS ITS TROOPS STAND BY

The hostilities between Hamas and Israel are escalating relentlessly even as mediators try to step in. Hamas sent a heavy barrage of rockets deep into Israel on Thursday as Israel pounded Gaza with more airstrikes and called up 9,000 more reservists, with the country's military talking of a possible ground attack. Meanwhile, Jews and Arabs are fighting in the country's streets. In the picture on the left, Israeli airstrikes hit a building in Gaza city. Above, an Israeli artillery unit at the border fires toward targets in the Gaza Strip | P9

Lab quality big hurdle for Covaxin mass production

SUMI SUKANYA DUTTA @ New Delhi

AMID growing chorus for technology transfer to allow other vaccine makers in India mass produce Covaxin, the Centre on Thursday said the sticking point was the lack of sophisticated technological platforms to manufacture the jab.

This vaccine, which is an inactivated version of Covid-19 virus and requires live virus to be cultured, can only be processed in laboratories categorised as biosafety level 3 (BSL 3), stressed V K Paul, member, health, Niti Aayog, who also heads the national Covid-19 task force. Covaxin was developed by Bharat Biotech with support from Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), which shares its intellectual property rights. The government health research body had invested about ₹35 crore in its pre-clinical and clinical trials. At present, only Bharat Biotech is a BSL 3 lab in India.

"This suggestion (of technology transfer) has been welcomed by Bharat Biotech but it needs to be understood that Covaxin has been developed from inactivated SARS-CoV 2 and can only be developed at laboratories with BSL 3 standards, which none of the other companies in India have as of now," said Paul. PB

PRIMER ON BIOSAFETY LEVEL

A biosafety level indicates a set of biocontainment precautions required to isolate disease causing pathogens in an enclosed lab. The levels of containment range from the lowest biosafety level 1 (BSL-1) to level 4 (BSL-4). BSL 3 is appropriate for work involving microbes that can cause serious and potentially lethal disease via inhalation and requires certain features like special constructions and ventilation systems

GENDER SKEW

13,88,15,914
people took the jabs till recently

7,30,07,844
Of them are male

6,57,88,899
Of them are female

19,171
others too took the jabs

72,18,945
More males than females took the shot | P7

Chhattisgarh stops work on new Assembly, pressure on Centre to halt Central Vista

EJAZ KAISER @ Raipur

AMID Opposition pressure on the Centre to suspend the ₹20,000-crore Central Vista project till the pandemic is brought under control, the Chhattisgarh government appears to have done the right thing by nixing plans to build the new Assembly building at a cost of ₹245 crore.

On Thursday, the Congress-governed Chhattisgarh government cancelled tenders for the new Assembly building and halted construction works of all ongoing major projects. The state has also adopted stringent austerity measures, a government spokesperson said.

Consequently, the ongoing construction works for the new Raj Bhawan, Assembly House, Chief Minister's House, bungalows for ministers and senior officials, and the New Circuit House at the Nava Raipur capital city stand suspended.

The foundation-laying ceremony of these works was performed on November 25, 2019.

The Chhattisgarh government's decision comes a day after 12 Opposition leaders wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi asking him to halt the Central Vista project and use the money to the fund the fight against coronavirus.

Meanwhile, the Delhi High Court is hearing a petition seeking an interim stay on the project saying the construction workers are exposed to the deadly coronavirus on a daily basis during the peak phase of the pandemic.